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ABSTRACT

This report reviews sociological research pertaining to marriage and family relations among blacks. Mate selection, economics in marriage, sexual relations, and the importance of children are among the topics examined. Observations and hypotheses about black social status are applied to research findings on family life in general, and contrasts are drawn between blacks and whites. Race, sex, age, education, employment and socioeconomic status are reported to be the primary factors that black Americans consider when deciding if and whom to marry. The relation between marital satisfaction and socioeconomic status is held to be stronger for blacks than for whites. Economic strain, marital status, race and the presence of children in the family are said to be stress related factors, and depression is reported to be higher among black couples than among their white counterparts. The report concludes, however, that because of the lack of information about the value systems of blacks and the norms of society in general, any statement regarding the role and attitudes of middle class black families must be considered tentative. (JCD)

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Marriage and the Black Family: What Research Says.

Earl J. Ogletree and Lillian Jackson

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MARRIAGE AND THE BLACK FAMILY:
WHAT RESEARCH SAYS

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&
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The axiom "knowledge of the past is essential for understanding of the present" is exceptionally pertinent for black Americans. The history of blacks is virtually without parallel when compared to those of their ethnic groups in America. Likewise, scholars of history have been unable to record "the African personality," according to Katz (1969). Yet, common among the various immigrant West African groups was an unrelenting commitment to the extended family system, noted Stamp (1956). Unlike Moynihan's (1967) depiction of the black "matriarch" American family, Stamp (1956) observed a familial system organized on a matrilineal basis with the "patriarch" as the dominant figure in African society. Also, Quarles (1964), Bennett Jr. (1969), Franklin (1948) and Elkins (1959) are but a few noted scholars who documented the rich cultural patterns in the family life of African society.

If one accepts Moynihan's (1967) and Stamp's (1956) contention then it is apparent that the black family structure was transposed in America. How then can one identify appropriate theoretical frameworks for the study of black family life? Conceptually a great deal of the scholarship has optioned the two popular views described by Nobles (1978):

(1) the cultural retention of the African world view was radically destroyed by the middle passage and/or the years of bondage, and (2) the horrors of the American experience - beginning with slavery-ultimately has determined the nature of development of black families (p.7).

To the contrary, "some recent studies argue that some black patterns are really due to the persistence of African influence (McFeatters, 1974, p. 35)." In addressing this conceptualization Franklin (1948) concluded that Africanism's survival in America was as great as it was due to the refusal of members of

the dominant group in the United States to wholeheartedly extend their own culture to blacks whom they brought over.

Clearly, blacks retained some aspects of African family patterns. But, how did the system or economic, political, social, psychological and sexual exploitation of the black man contribute to the disintegration of the black family? And to what degree did the role of the sexes change in the new environment? Many historical accounts showed that the slave-holder sought to diminish the authority of the black man in the family. Bennett Jr. (1969) wrote:

Because slaves were forbidden by law to enter into contractual arrangements, their marriages were not legally binding relationships. Husbands, wives, and children could be separated at the discretion of the slaveholder, as was frequently the case. Thus, it was impossible to maintain a stable family system. The slave family had little importance as regards to the traditional functions which marriage was expected to perform for those who entered into the relationship. Parents had little to say or do about rearing children or controlling other forces leading to cohesion in family life. The nature of the institution of slavery was such that no family in the usual sense can be said to have existed. Children derived their condition from the status of the mother (p. 42).

Stampp (1956) and Poliski and Brown (1967) attributed the demise of the traditional male as "provider and protector" of the family to the effects of slavery. Historical accounts by Frazier (1957), Holt (1980), Bernard (1966), Broom and Glenn (1965) and Gutman (1976) give further credence to the belief that the slaveholder diminished the authority of black male in the family and that instability was a common factor among poor free blacks before emancipation and during the reconstruction era. But Elkins (1963) maintained that despite the slaves restricted capacity to provide for and protect their families many husbands and fathers did in fact assert themselves to resist

the possibility of their families being torn asunder because they strongly valued ties of marriage and kinship.

Hare and Hare (1974) observed the plight of black women beyond their historical achievements during the slavery years through the days of the civil rights and black power movements of 1970. They remarked:

They (black women) possesses a keen sense of themselves as the backbone and major source of strength in the black family unit...required to play the feminine role as prescribed by social custom yet driven to a masculine role by white society's harsher rejection of the black man occupationally. Thus even the positive virtues of being a black woman - easier access to jobs and financial favors compared to black men - have negative consequences in that they deprecate the black man (p.99).

Similar conclusions were stated by Farley and Hermolin (1971) who approached the issue in a more contemporary vein in referring to bias in "job and housing markets" as an obstacle intensifying the difficulty of black males in assuming the traditional role as head of the household. Well, then how has this biased limitation imposed on the black men affected the attitudes of black women toward the black man, especially those who have advanced to middle-class status and feel that a martial partner's status should at least parallel their own. Hare and Hare summarized the effects of the black women's plight:

Although she longs for the financial security offered by the white male, she (the black women) feel ethically obliged to reject this overtures on grounds of loyalty to her race and its suffering at the white man's hand. Besides she is aware and resentful of the fact that the white man marries only the more successful black women and white men are restricted and usually, clandestine and sinister sexual arrangements or abuse...(1974, p. 101)

The problems and the accompanying anxiety of blacks in determining their status in society, whether in marriage or the single state, as a professional in the work force, homemaker or both, are revealed in their attitudes toward marriage and the family. The literature provides minimal

insight into the attitudes of middle-class blacks (especially males) except to compare them to their white counterparts. The growing number of blacks attaining higher socio-economic status and the resultant changes in lifestyles may have a profound impact on society. Because the 1970 census figures show that the majority of the black population is concentrated in metropolitan areas the potential impact is probably more pronounced in urban areas.

Mate Selection

Scores of sociological studies show that one is more likely to fall in love and marry someone who is of the same race and religion, has as much intelligence and education and comes from a similar social and economic class. Lee and Stone (1980) attested to this homogamous view and stated that "in cultures where mate selection is autonomous, interpersonal attraction or "romantic love" is likely to be considered legitimate basis for marriage (p. 319)." However, the selection process upholds socially approved mandates. Freeman (1977) observed the social taboos of incest and the ethnocentrism apparent in selecting mates with equal traditional cultural values as one's family. Thus, if the social dictum of the ethnic group is followed, eligible mates are limited and mate selection is difficult for its members.

Hollinghead's (1977) study supported the assumptions that "mates are selected for individuals by controls placed on them by their culture (p. 387)." Individuals have complete freedom in choosing a mate. Even though findings showed a rise in interracial marriages they also concluded that individuals tend to marry their own kind. Religion was the second most limiting factor in an individual's choice of a mate with ethnic origin, class, and age following.

Middle class individuals seeking marriage are afforded an extensive field of eligibles in their ability to move socially in all directions. One may choose a mate for a lower or higher social status, but usually one selects a mate whose value system closely resembles his own. Glick and Spanier (1980) documented the greater excess of women among black during the years in which mate selection and first marriage typically occur. A Census Bureau statistic (1975) revealed the black sex ration was 90.8 men per 100 women in 1975. Black men in one sense may be viewed as commodity in short supply and high demand.

The choices of the middle class black woman is further lessened when education is a factor in mate selection. Pouissant (1977) stated that:

The more education a black women has, the more threat she is to her husband. Education may lower a black women's prospect of finding a black husband who is her educational equal or superior (pp. 160-162).

Ladner (1977) added another dimension to the shortage of eligibles for professional black women. She cited that:

Fifty-seven percent of black women between the ages of 25 and 45 are living without spouse, either separated, divorced, widowed or never married. There is a numerical shortage of black men. There are roughly one million more black women than black men in the U.S. population. Also, a significant number of black men who may be viewed as potential spouses are burdened with unemployment. A significant number of all ages are incarcerated, while others are in the armed forces and stationed at bases outside the country (p. 37).

Tyson and Tyson (1977) agreed with Ladner's (1977) numerical findings and predicted that "black women may seek white male companionship, continue life alone or settle for less than the ideal (p. 106)." Glick and Spanier (1980) added credence to Tyson and Tyson's (1977) prediction with their observation of black women enlarging their field of eligibles by marrying

males who tend to be older, who have lower educational attainment, and who have previously been married. Others who support the view of the limited choices of black women are Blood (1972) and Liebow (1967).

Economics in Marriage

Researchers have shown immense and devastating effects of poverty on marriage and the black family. A government study led by Moynihan (1965) blamed the weakness of the black family structure for perpetuating the cycle of poverty and deprivation in the lives of black people. Becquaret (1976) reported "...their families are at the bottom of any economic scale one might devise (p. 67)." Census Bureau official Norton (1980) gave credibility to Becquaret's (1976) contention in noting that economically blacks have lost many of the gains of the 1960's. Contrary to Moynihan's view, Ebony (ed., Johnson, 1978) concluded that economic stability is one of the most considered factors which caused many blacks to remain in unhappy marriages.

...black couples who together may earn salaries from \$20,000 to \$30,000 feel that they can fare better economically as a unit than on their individual salaries of 10,000 to 15,000. Therefore, they sacrifice personal happiness to maintain a comfortable standard of living (p. 160).

In the black community, education and economic are inextricably entwined since it is generally believed that higher education is a prerequisite of securing high salaried wages and professions of higher status. Accordingly, Renee (1977) used the population in Alameda County, California to determine the cause of dissatisfaction among blacks and whites of various socio-economic backgrounds. The study was comparative in that it considered education, employment, race, sex and age. She summarized:

- (1) Black people and others with low income or little education were more apt to be dissatisfied with their marriage than were white people or people with adequate income and education.
- (2) The relation between marital satisfaction and socio-economic status is stronger for blacks than for whites (p. 442).

Her findings also showed that the level of dissatisfaction with marriage was double that of whites in the under 45 age group, due to socio-economic factors.

A women's freedom to choose the dual-career lifestyle has been hypothesized in the literature, as an important predictor of happiness in marriage. Both partners are less happy if the wife works because of economic necessity than if she participated by choice, according to Orden and Bradburn (1969). Although some of the literature determined that a dual-career partnership undermined the marital relationship. Rapoport and Rapoport (1971) postulated another viewpoint which is supported to some extent by their data. They noted that the marital relationship is more likely to be strengthened if each partner is economically viable and feels that he/she is achieving a great deal out of career and family possibilities.

Looking further at the relationship between economics and marital happiness, Scanzoni (1978) observed that money earned by the wife can be used by them as a bargaining mechanism within the family to achieve some desired goal. He stated that the traditional role of husband as provider is continuously undergoing change. Ladner (1977) bluntly opinioned the effects of economics on the black women:

One of the dominant characteristics of black women is that many will spend a portion of their lives in poverty and increasingly will either be widowed, divorced or separated during their lifetime... Therefore, it is misleading to focus on the

advances black women have made without also carefully examining the grim economic realities that have a severe effect on all blacks (p. 38).

Additionally, Ladner (1977) addressed the "physical and mental well-being" related to poverty. Blacks may view marriage as a means of upward mobility, especially when both spouses are employed. Economically stable mates provide financial security and logically relieve much of the stress associated with low incomes and financial worries.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Marriage

The 1970 census indicated that young people are marrying at a later age than the previous decade. While in 1960 around 65 percent of the males and 41 percent of the females in the 18 to 24 age group were single, in 1970 more than 67 percent of the males and 48 percent of the females remained single. Clayton and Voss (1977) contended that because individuals are delaying marriage is partially the reason for the overall drop in the number of marriages in the United States in the past five years. Beyond that he concluded that economic recession, an incline in cohabitation, longevity in school, and increased female participation in labor have resulted in a lower marriage rate. In addition, they observed a recent decline in the remarriage rate. But, despite their observation of the rate of decline in marriage and remarriage Clayton and Voss (1977) predicted that approximately 95 percent of all Americans will marry at least once, and 80 percent of those who later divorce will remarry.

Obviously, as society changes the institution of marriage adopts to its demands. Although values associated with marriage are changing, marriage is still central to the lifestyle of most people. Conformity to the concept of husband, wife, and children as the basic social unit is

considered to be in the best interest of our society as evident throughout the literature. Howe (1977) cited the Wisconsin Family Code (1976) as confirmation of the need for marriage and the family. This code depicted marriage and the family as essential to the survival of cultural values in the social order. Should marriage be the goal of every "normal" man and woman? The answer is "yes" - if one accepts current attitudes about marriage in America. Lee and Stone (1980) surmised that almost all societies view married life as the most normal and desirable type of existence for adults.

Middle-class couples have the most expectations from marriage of any class, according to related studies. Duberman (1974) cited Benson's (1971) list of six "marital obligations" and they are included here as the expectations of all married people:

1. Husbands and wives have the right to expect that their spouses will be truthful and dependable.
2. Couples...expect that each will help bear the work load of the relationship.
3. Spouses have a right to expect ego support and sympathy from each other.
4. Married people...expect that each will communicate with the other that confidence will be respected and that they will be entertaining and interesting to each other.
5. Giving sexual satisfaction is a task...and... couples should work to avoid routine, monotonous sexual relations.
6. Married people should show a willingness to do things for each other that are beyond routine duty (p. 99).

If actuated, these shared obligations and commitments may lead to a most fulfilling and advantageous married life for couples.

Philliber and Hiller (1979) considered status attainment or upward

social mobility as an advantage of marriage:

The probability that a working woman married to a husband with a middle-class job will identify with the middle-class increase 0.99 percent for each increase of one point in the prestige of the occupation she holds. This mean...that 22.5 percent more public school teachers (NORC prestige scores of 56) would be expected to identify with the middle-class if they were married to husband employed in middle-class jobs (p. 60).

High income attainment should not be confused with status or prestige. Philliber and Hiller (1979) noted that due to racial bias prevalent in our society, blacks are unable to obtain the more prestigious levels of employment.

Newkirk (1974) lists "fulfillment of personality needs" as an acceptable marital value today. She found no difference in values held by blacks than those of the total middle-class structure. Therefore, marriage may afford blacks self-fulfillment or self-realization. Contrary to this idea, Baruch, Barnett and Rivers (1980) found through their study that "for employed women, a high-prestige job, rather than a husband is the best predictor of well-being (p. 1)". They pointed out that this doesn't mean having good feelings about one's self is based on a high-level job, but it was the single factor that correlated most closely with a woman's sense of self-esteem. In a similar subject related survey, the Institute of Life Insurance indicated that "87 percent of the respondents over 29 years of age chose a "happy family life" as the most important goal in their lives - a distant second was "developing as an individual" with 7 percent (U.S. News & World Report, ed., Flieger, 1975, p. 35)."

The impact marriage has on physical and mental health was given particular emphasis in much of the literature. Verbrugge (1979) associated marriage with good health. Census data were utilized to show that married women had a lower

prevalency rate of work disability than single, divorced or widowed in an age group of 18 to 64 years.

Similarly, Rushing (1979) concluded, in his study that the married and widowed showed a lower percentage in experiencing certain mental disorders than those whose marriages were dissolved by divorce. Gove (1977) contributed controversial evidence in his studies, providing data which seemingly contradict the Verbrugge (1979) and Rushing's (1979) conclusions. Gove (1979) and Rushing's (1979) findings were based on institutionalized persons wherein Verbrugge (1979) did not include in her sample that segment of the population. Jet (ed., Johnson, 1980) cited findings of a study of the National Institute of Mental Health (1980) which concluded that "singles" suffer from more medical and psychological problems than their married counterparts. Compared with couples, singles:

1. Visit doctors more frequently
2. Usually drink and smoke more
3. Have more car accidents
4. Suffer greater incidence of cancer of the digestive system
5. Are twice as likely to kill themselves (p. 32)

Similarly, Jet magazine (ed., Johnson, 1976) noted that "a review of government studies showed married men had a markedly lower mortality rate than their single, widowed or divorced brethren. And the disparity in the death continues throughout life (p. 42)."

Weigert and Hastings (1977) perceived marriage as a source of both "Identity bestowal" and "identity loss". It is apparent that identity loss can be a source of conflict. They concluded:

Maintenance of traditional family structures may result in high potential for painful personal identity loss for which there is a low social support and legitimation. Moderns would thus face the dilemma of whether to seek strong affective ties but risk non-legitimated and meaningless identity loss or to avoid the source of which identity loss but weaken

affective relationships (p. 117).

It is not clearly shown in the literature how blacks perceive themselves relative to self-identity. The emphasis on the ability of blacks to withstand social hardships, particularly the black woman's strengths, implies an independence entirely disassociated with a martial partner. The blacks are subjected to the same stresses and respond much the same way as all adults indicate a need for research.

Pearlin and Johnson (1977) studied the stresses of married life:

Marriage can function as a protective barrier against the distressful consequences of external threats. Marriage does not prevent economic and social problems from invading life, but it apparently can help people fend off the psychological assaults that such problems otherwise create (p. 714).

Economic strain, martial status, race and the presence of children in the family were seen as stress related factors in their data. Race was perceived as contributing more to depression than poverty, yet the two are interrelated. Married couples with children showed an increased degree of depression. Then, one could conclude that depression is experienced more among blacks than among their white counterparts.

The ability of blacks to sublimate genuine feelings and attitudes is not an easily researched factor. It should be considered in any discussion of their apparent strengths and/or weaknesses, and is one deliberated in this writer's study.

The black family is perceived as a matriarchal structure by most accounts in the literature. Blood (1972) Pouissant (1977) Ladner (1977) and Renee (1977) agreed that it is a role forced upon black women. Willie and Greenblatt (1978) contradicted their observation and cited data presented by Farley (1970) to show that most black families have both spouses present

and are intact. "Two parent families may only be considered matriarches if the females dominate the decision making process," stated Willie and Greenblatt (1970, p. 692). Beyond that, they contend, the middle-class black family is more equalitarian in role differentiation than any other family type. Studies of Middleton and Putney (1960), Mack (1978), TenHouten (1970) and Willie (1976) were reviewed by Willie and Greenblatt (1978). These studies supported their conclusion that rigid role-differentiation for husbands and wives most frequently occurs in middle-class white families. Blood and Wolfe (1969) also reported that black women have more decision-making power in the family than their white counterparts.

Cervantes (1966) regarded the biosocial functions of women in establishing their natural roles as wives and mothers. In this context, Moroney (1979) cautioned that the traditional roles of homemaker, wife and mother are undergoing change for women, including blacks. Mason, Czajka and Arber (1974) confirmed Moroney's (1979) observation on the basis of their ten year study of changes in sex-role attitudes in and outside the home, among a select group of women with varying socioeconomic backgrounds. The study also gauged the influence of the women's movement by comparing the rate of change before and after 1970. They found that women of all ages and socioeconomic backgrounds became more "liberated" in the way they saw themselves in relation to men, marriage, children and work. The authors were unable to determine that the rise of the Women's Liberation Movement caused the decade after 1964 but noted that the increasing egalitarianism of attitudes may have contributed to the movement's rapid spread. On a similar stance, a survey by Black Enterprise (ed., Graves, 1980) 60.5 percent of a sample of 2,000 respondents felt that the Women's Liberation Movement is insignificant for black women; 41.6 percent felt that black women should not participate

in the movement and 69.9 percent believed that white females are taking the jobs of blacks.

Throughout the literature, it was shown that women of all socio-economic backgrounds increasingly showed their disapproval of the traditional breadwinner-homemaker division of labor assigned the sexes. But, Mason, Czajka and Arber (1974) attested that seventy-five percent of college educated women surveyed felt that a husband's career should take precedence over a wife's. In a Market Opinion Research Pool of 1,522 women in the United States (1975):

Nearly one-half think the ideal life would be to stay home with young children and to combine homemaking with a job and career during the balance of the working years...Among women 18-34, over three-fourths said a lifestyle they would prefer is a combination of homemaking and career... Those in the 35-54 age group show the highest proportions (40 percent) of having combined working and being a homemaker...Women with low income opt less for returning to work as children get older and show the career mainly as a housewife and show the preference for a career mainly as a housewife (pp. 102-103).

The analysts also observed that the actual pattern of working and being a homemaker in the adult years is greatly affected by age, education and marital status. Older women with less than high school graduate education and are married or widowed are more apt to choose a lifestyle of homemaker while the younger group with education beyond high school and are single or divorced tend to work continuously.

According to some experts, women who take on the roles of wife, mother and paid employee are suppose to suffer the most stress. Yet, Baruch, Barnett and Rivers (1980) presented evidence of the contrary:

Our study indicates that involvement in multiple roles enhances women's well being instead of

diminishing it...women who score highest in well being are those in high-prestige jobs who are also married and have children (p. 1).

The literatures and the mass media abound with demographic accounts of the inclining female labor market. Pifer (1978) reported "women workers total 21 million in approximately 46 million intact marriage (p. 4)." He also observed that the entry of so many women into the job market has made "household maintenance and child care" a shared responsibility of both husband and wife. On another front, "organized groups of males are beginning to appear in cities across the country to demand equal rights with women in divorce courts...charging employers with sex discrimination...and forcing employers to offer "female" jobs to males (U.S. News and World Report, ed., Flieger, 1974 pp. 47-48)."

Many blacks have shown disenchantment with marriage as the goal for self-fulfillment as indicated by the high increase in divorce rates. Social policy is likely to adapt to the changing mores as the trends are studied and more current attitudes become known. The acceptance of marital alternatives has been reported in the literature (Lyness, Lipetz and Davis, 1974, Glick and Norton, 1977, and Newcomb, 1979). Whether the trends continue will certainly influence further inquiry and study.

Sexual Relations in Marriage

In general, most blacks view sex as very significant in maintaining a marriage. A survey of women, conducted by McCall's found that a significant minority of happy wives insist that "so-called" "good sex" is not crucial if a profound, encompassing love exists (ed., Gittleson, 1980, p. 27)."

In the same survey, some wives perceived "job related rewards" and the successes of their husband's of equal status as "good sex" in their marriages. Both

older and younger wives expressed that sexual love should be actuated often and infidelity could be overlooked if other aspects of the marriage were satisfying or if dissolution was disadvantageous to the children and the couples involved. For others, fidelity was of utmost importance in continuing the marriage. Jacoby (1975) remarked, "the sense of constantly deepening intimacy - both physical and emotional - is the most striking common denominator of good marriages in different generations (p. 68)."

For blacks, the importance of sex in marriage takes on added dimensions. Tucker (1980) maintained that inherent in black men is an inner core of insecurity which causes them to seek constant reassurance of their desirability. To them, their sexual performance is an indicator of their masculinity and a continuous feedback of how well they are doing is needed. Pouissant (1972) observed: "Black male sexuality has been enveloped in myths, fantasies, distortions and stereotypes (p. 114)."

Popular literature alludes to black prowess, but sexual studies and reports provide few hard facts. Because blacks, for uncertain reasons, have not been analyzed in the major sex studies, the common beliefs and values of black male sexual behavior cannot be confirmed or rejected,

Tucker (1980) gestured that women use sex as a "weapon," to be denied when problems in the marriage arise and cautioned that the denial is one reason why marital mates seek gratification outside the marriage. She stated that women wrongfully assume that they "have it made" if they and their husbands are sexually compatible. Pouissant (1972) concurred and noted: "Many black men (and women) try to escape their social problems by jumping into bed, where for a brief moment they experience a sense of pleasure and strength (p. 120)."

It seems, then, that there are assorted viewpoints on the degree of importance of sex in a successful marriage and the variance may depend on the value blacks place on other areas of the marriage.

The black man was advisably cautioned on the escalating trend toward sexual liberation by Pouissant (1972): "Black men should not confuse political emancipation with sexual liberation (p. 120)."

Liberated sexual views of women were considered by Harlow (1979):

Women seem confused by what liberation really means. Accordingly, if liberation means being able to find rewards in a career without a partner, and taking your sexual life as you find it, then women can look forward to emotional exhaustion (p. 48).

Essence (ed., Gillespie, 1979) conducted a four-part survey in which one aspect dealt with the frequency of sexual activity among spouses. One significant finding was that 57.6 percent of the women respondents were "moderately happy" in once weekly sex participation in their marriage, while 6 percent of the women who were "moderately unhappy" in their marriage did not like participating in sexual intercourse. None of the women who were reportedly "very happy" indicated a dislike of sexual intercourse, and less than one percent of the "moderately happy" did not like sex. Sorrel and Sorrel (1980) reported that 71 percent of 1,100 couples surveyed complained of lack of desire. They concluded that many people feel inadequate due to insatiable sexual creatures, images and inuendos portrayed in the media. Botwin and Fine (1980) noted that "the wrong attitude toward aging contributes to the waning of desire in some men. They feel they should be losing interest in sex as they grow older and so they do (p. 93)."

A questionnaire to determine one's feeling about sex appeared in Redbook (ed., Sorrell and Sorrell, 1980). The authors defined sex as

"...more than physical intercourse,...an intricate network involving all the things we do when we have a loving relationship...the object of (which) is reproduction...(p. 42)."

The surveys quoted here, however, represent the sex act as a physical function, and the questions responded to made the distinction very explicit. If one considers the amount of print dealing with the attitudes of the sexes toward sex, either the activity has taken on new dimensions or the openness of discussion of intimate relations is indicative of attitudes long submerged in the minds of people.

Importance of Children in Marriage

So changed was the function of the family in the 1970's that there are those who believe it has lost its usefulness. But most sociologists agree, that despite the apparent change in the function, the American family remains essential to the creation of future generations.

Outstanding in the literature is the growing trend among couples to have fewer children. Jet (ed. Johnson, 1980) cited government figures showing that "in 1978 more than four of every 10 of the 5,183,000 women who reported having their first child indicated that they planned no future births (p. 48)." An ABC News Harris Survey of 1,514 adults concluded:

People who have children will choose to have smaller families...fewer people will choose to have children... fathers and mothers will take an equal role in keeping house and caring for the children (Chicago Tribune, 1980, p. 10).

Similarly, the Chicago Tribune (1980) presented a panoramic picture of choices of lifestyles of the nation's households. They reported that 13 percent of the total population maintained a family composition of mother, father, and child. Thirty percent had no children; 21 percent were employed parents; 21 percent were single; 8 percent were single parents;

1.5 percent were cohabiting couples and 5.5 percent were categorized as others.

Despite the joys of parenthood, offsprings often cause a multitude of added problems in a marital union, as evident in the literature. A study by Campbell (1975) found the highest degree of satisfaction with life occurs among young married people with no children, and as kids enter the scene, happiness generally goes down and stress goes up. For the martial couple, the parenting of a child may change the relationship they've established with each other (Rossi, 1974). In Renee's (1977) study statistical findings showed that regardless of income or economic level couples were more dissatisfied with their marriages after the birth of their children. But, as indicated earlier, financial strain necessitating the wife to gain employment diminishes the "happiness" of both partners. Pifer (1978) compared the 1920 female labor force of 20 percent to the 1976 female labor force of 41 percent. He projected that "one of two American workers in the future will be female, (p. 4)" but the social impact probably cannot be fully ascertained, but will challenge the women's ability to withstand the pressures of work or career, good spouse relations, and child-rearing responsibilities concurrently.

Renee (1977) agreed with Rossi's (1974) observation that parenthood creates problems for couples and added:

Parenthood is especially difficult for black people. Even when they have an adequate income they can do little to protect their children from the irrational restrictions, insults and degradation black people encounter in this society (p. 437).

Hobbs and Wimbish (1977) checklist of bothersome items encountered by parents after, the birth of the first child listed the "interruption of sleeping habits" and "restricting activities" as the highest for both husband and wife. Females considered the "extra amount of work" and males viewed the

altering of plans prior to the birth of the baby as second in the most bothersome features. The following conclusion was included in their study:

Black parents...experienced slightly more overall difficulty in adjusting to their first child than did white parents, but the magnitude of mean scores in measuring the difference did not warrant the label of crisis to describe their experience (p. 688).

Moynihan (1977) and Moroney (1977) expressed a need to develop a national policy impacting the concept of family. Moroney (1977) maintained that the possibility of the evolution of a "welfare state" exist due to the changing of traditional roles of mother and father. Relatedly Novak (1977) contended that "the role of a father, mother, and of children with respect to them, if the absolutely critical center of social force (p.3)."

The literature provided numerous studies on marriage and the family, more than can be reasonably discussed in this paper.

However, the data indicate there is a need for social practitioners and scholars to examine closely their ideas about black marital relationships and family roles. Also there is not enough known about the attitudes of middle-class blacks to make definitive statements relating to the middle-class black family as a sub-group within the total social structure. Besides, their conflicting views regarding marriage and family there is a need to determine if such attitudes are provided "by the norms in our culture... (Katz, 1967, p. 345)," and thus applicable to all middle-class people in American society and not limited to a value system of middle-class blacks.

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